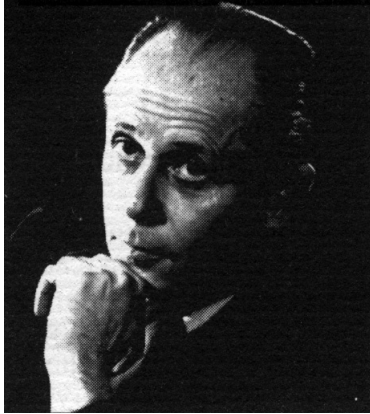


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Hans Selye

(1907–1982)

Hans Selye (Selye János in Hungarian), the founder of the stress concept and a principal contributor to the establishment of modern endocrinology, was born in Komárom (at that time a town in Hungary, presently Komarno, Slovakia) in 1907, the son of Hugo Selye, a surgeon colonel in the army of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Hans Selye was educated in a Benedictine monastery and later in the Medical School of the Charles (German) University of Prague (at that time capital of Czechoslovakia). He spoke Hungarian, German, Slovak, Czech, French, English, and later Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian. He spent a significant portion of his life in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the United States, and Canada. Nevertheless, he was always proud of his Magyar (Hungarian) heritage. He was fond of Hungarian foods and wines. Selye was a convivial fellow, who had a special sense of humor.

Selye, as a medical student at Charles University in Prague, observed that patients suffering from different diseases often exhibited identical signs and symptoms. They just “looked sick.” Possibly, this observation was the first step towards the recognition of stress. Later he discovered and described the general adaptation syndrome, the stress. His results and concepts made a great impact on both the scientific world as well as on our everyday life. His ideas have been used in medicine and in almost all biological disciplines from endocrinology to animal breeding and social psychology. His books became bestsellers all over the world. His laboratory, the Institute of Experimental Medicine and Surgery at the University of Montreal, was an international center of medical research. At present, his students and coworkers are leaders of various scientific institutions all over the world. He probably received more awards than any other physician (including the highest order of Canada), but not the Nobel Prize, although he was nominated for it several times. Selye was internationally regarded as one of the world’s leading authorities on experimental medicine. He died in Montreal, Canada in 1982, but his greatness is unaltered and his influence on the scientific community is unabating. On the basis of his brilliant concepts, his students and coworkers opened many new avenues of scientific research.

LÓRÁND BERTÓK

